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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (12/10): Abbas in Egypt and Knesset Passage of "Continuity" Bill Make Headlines

Main Stories:

Abbas Meets Mubarak in Sharm El-Sheikh

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas' meeting with Egyptian President Mubarak was the main story in all three dailies. Independent daily Al-Quds headlines Abbas' quote that the PA rejects Israel's settlement moratorium and regrets the U.S. retreat on settlement cessation. In regards to the EU statement on Jerusalem, Abbas noted that although important it was less than what was originally proposed.

Independent daily Al-Ayyam runs a headline reflecting Abbas' statement regarding national reconciliation, "The Ball is in Hamas' Court Now." PA official daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida quotes Abbas saying that agreement on the prisoner exchange deal has yet to be reached.

Continuity Bill Passes; PA Blamed for Lack of Progress

Dailies and Ma'an report that the Israeli Knesset passed a "continuity" bill on Wednesday to ensure that a measure calling for a national referendum on the Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories moves forward. The proposed legislation states that any governmental decision to withdraw from the occupied Golan Heights and East Jerusalem requires a national, public referendum.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida and Ma'an report that Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu accused the PA of rejecting peace negotiations as a means of avoiding concessions. Speaking to his Security Cabinet yesterday, Netanyahu said, "It seems that the Palestinians have adopted a strategy of rejecting negotiations with Israel in order to avoid the demands of Israel and the international community which require compromises on their [PA] part."

Local Media Largely Ignore Anti-Moratorium Rally

There was little coverage of the anti-settlement moratorium demonstration in local Palestinian media. Independent daily Al-Ayyam and PA official daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida both ran stories. Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, which has the smallest circulation of the dailies, was the only local Palestinian paper that ran front page coverage of the demonstration. Its article was placed below the fold, at the bottom of the page, and mainly consisted of a photo showing settlers holding banners that read "Stop the Freeze." Independent daily, and largest in circulation, Al Quds, did not cover the demonstration. Independent Palestinian news outlet Ma'an, which prides itself in covering late-breaking news, posted only a headline (no accompanying article), "Thousands of right-wing Israelis protest settlement freeze in Jerusalem." Al Jazeera International ran a brief photo spot on the demonstration.

JERUSALEM 00002240 002 OF 002

EU Statement

In an exclusive interview with independent Palestinian news outlet Ma'an, Sweden's Consul General in Jerusalem, Nils Eliasson, downplayed reports that the final EU statement on the Middle East peace process had changed significantly from the original drafted authored by Sweden, saying, "there are very few substantive differences between the two."

PLO Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat is quoted in Ma'an welcoming EU conclusions on the status of Jerusalem. In Erekat's opinion, "The EU has released a basic blueprint for the resumption of meaningful negotiations. If these principles are translated into reality, negotiations should resume."

Berlanty Denied Permission to Continue Studies

Ma'an reports that a three-judge panel from the Israel's Supreme Court ruled on Wednesday that Bethlehem University student Berlanty Azzam will not be permitted to return to the West Bank to finish her degree.

Fayyad Meets Italian Foreign Minister

In a joint press conference, in Ramallah, with Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini, PA Prime Minister Fayyad stated that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on the lands occupied by Israel since 1967 is the only possible way to achieve peace. Frattini emphasized that the EU is working closely with the United States to end the conflict and achieve peace in the Middle East.

BLOCK QUOTES:

- 1) Rasem Ebdat, writing in Al-Quds under the title "The New EU Statement: Did it Bring Anything New?" believes that "We

[Palestinians] should not be deceived by the EU statement ...what is important is not the statement but implementation of the ideas expressed in the statement."

2) Al-Quds runs an editorial entitled "The EU Statement: Is It for Archiving or Implementing?" that questions whether Europe is serious about its statement. The writer opines that if the EU is serious about the conclusions it proposed in the statement then "...it [the EU] has to take serious measures and tangible actions against t Israel...We [Palestinians] need more than statements, we need actions."

RUBINSTEIN